

What is claimed is:

1 1. A system for managing licenses for protected software on a
2 communication network, the system comprising:
3 at least one client computer capable of being coupled to the
4 communication network for requesting a commuter authorization to use the protected software
5 and for storing a commuter authorization lifetime representing a time period for which the
6 commuter authorization is valid; and

7 at least one license server coupled to the communication network, each
8 license server programmed for managing a distribution of allocations to use the protected
9 software and at least one license server programmed for granting a commuter authorization in
10 response to a request for a commuter authorization;

11 wherein after a commuter authorization is communicated from a granting
12 license server to a requesting client computer, the requesting client computer may use the
13 protected software while coupled to or decoupled from the communication network until the
14 commuter authorization lifetime expires.

1 2. A system as recited in claim 1, wherein while the requesting client
2 computer maintains a valid commuter authorization, the requesting client computer may open
3 the protected software multiple times, including simultaneous instantiations of the protected
4 software.

1 3. A system as recited in claim 1, the at least one license server further
2 programmed for granting a commuter authorization to the requesting client computer and
3 decrementing a count of available allocations only if there is an available allocation in the at
4 least one license server.

1 4. A system as recited in claim 3, the requesting client computer further
2 including memory for storing commuter authorization information including the commuter
3 authorization lifetime and a check-in value received from the granting license server when the
4 granting license server grants the commuter authorization to the requesting client computer;
5 and

6 the granting license server further including memory for storing
7 commuter authorization information including the commuter authorization lifetime and a
8 check-in value when the granting license server grants the commuter authorization to the
9 requesting client computer.

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1 5. A system as recited in claim 4, the requesting client computer
2 programmed for returning the commuter authorization by setting its check-in value to a
3 returned state and communicating a check-in message to the granting license server; and
4 the granting license server further programmed for setting its check-in
5 value to the returned state and incrementing its count of available allocations upon receipt of
6 the check-in message.

1 6. A system as recited in claim 5, wherein if the commuter authorization is
2 not returned prior to an expiration of the commuter authorization lifetime, at the expiration of
3 the commuter authorization lifetime:

4 the requesting client computer is further programmed for setting its
5 check-in value to a returned state; and

6 the granting license server is further programmed for setting its check-in
7 value to the returned state and incrementing its count of available allocations.

1 7. A system as recited in claim 1, the requesting client computer
2 programmed for enabling a user to select the commuter authorization lifetime.

1 8. A system as recited in claim 1, the requesting client computer
2 programmed for enabling a user to select the license server from which to request a commuter
3 authorization.

1 9. A system as recited in claim 4, the at least one license server comprising
2 a pool of license servers, and
3 the granting license server further programmed for communicating the
4 commuter authorization lifetime and the check-in value stored in the granting license server to
5 other license servers in the pool when the granting license server grants the commuter
6 authorization to the requesting client computer, so that even if the granting license server
7 should go down, another license server in the pool can act as the granting license server.

1 10. A system as recited in claim 1, the requesting client computer further
2 programmed for detecting attempts to tamper with its internal clock and invalidating the
3 commuter authorization if tampering is detected.

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11. A method for managing licenses for protected software on a communication network, the method comprising the steps of:

coupling at least one client computer and at least one license server to the communication network;

communicating a request for a commuter authorization to use the protected software from the at least one client computer to the at least one license server over the communication network;

granting a commuter authorization to the at least one client computer from the at least one license server (and decrementing a count of available allocations within the at least one license server only if there is an available allocation in the at least one license server; and)

storing a commuter authorization lifetime representing a time period for which the commuter authorization is valid within the at least one client computer;

wherein after a commuter authorization is communicated from a granting license server to a requesting client computer, the requesting client computer may use the protected software while coupled to or decoupled from the communication network until the commuter authorization lifetime expires.

CLAIM 3

12. A method as recited in claim 11, wherein while the requesting client computer maintains a valid commuter authorization, the requesting client computer may open the protected software multiple times, including simultaneous instantiations of the protected software.

1 13. A method as recited in claim 11, the step of granting a commuter
2 authorization to the at least one client computer from the at least one license server further
3 including the steps of:

4 communicating the commuter authorization lifetime and a check-in value
5 from the granting license server to the requesting client computer; and

6 storing the commuter authorization lifetime and the check-in value in the
7 requesting client computer and the granting license server.

1 14. A method as recited in claim 13, wherein when the protected software is
2 no longer needed, the method further includes the steps of:

3 returning the commuter authorization by setting the check-in value stored
4 in the requesting client computer to a returned state and communicating a check-in message to
5 the granting license server; and

6 setting the check-in value stored in the granting license server to the
7 returned state and incrementing the count of available allocations stored in the granting license
8 server when the granting license server receives the check-in message.

1 15. A method as recited in claim 14, wherein if the commuter authorization
2 is not returned prior to an expiration of the commuter authorization lifetime, at the expiration
3 of the commuter authorization lifetime the method further includes the steps of:

4 setting the check-in value stored in the requesting client computer to a
5 returned state; and

6 setting the check-in value stored in the granting license server to the
7 returned state and incrementing the count of available allocations stored in the granting license
8 server.

1 16. A method as recited in claim 11, the step of communicating a request for
2 a commuter authorization to use the protected software further including the step of selecting
3 the commuter authorization lifetime.

1 17. A method as recited in claim 11, the step of communicating a request for
2 a commuter authorization to use the protected software further including the step of selecting
3 the license server from which to request a commuter authorization.

1 18. A method as recited in claim 13, the at least one license server
2 comprising a pool of license servers, the method further including the steps of:
3 communicating the commuter authorization lifetime and the check-in value
4 stored in the granting license server to other license servers in the pool when the granting
5 license server grants the commuter authorization to the requesting client computer, so that even
6 if the granting license server should go down, another license server in the pool can act as the
7 granting license server.

1 19. A method as recited in claim 11, further including the step of detecting
2 attempts to tamper with an internal clock of the requesting client computer and invalidating the
3 commuter authorization if tampering is detected.

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